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ABSTRACT

While the past 10 years have been marked by major gains for working women, the overall status of working women has improved very little. The profile of the working woman today is different from that of 25 years ago. Today over 44 million women work. Of these, 7 million belong to minority groups. Since 1930 families headed by women have tripled in number, and only 56 percent of working women are married. Women have consistently remained clustered in certain occupations associated with low-paying, dead-end, tedious jobs. Women not only receive lower wages relative to men, but their economic status is actually deteriorating. The unemployment rate for women is consistently higher than for men. Data indicate that women are denied equal pay for equal work, jobs traditionally held by women rate lower salaries, and women are denied access to higher paying jobs. Department of Labor projections indicate a dramatic increase in the number of women in the labor force by 1990. If women are to achieve economic equality, the public and private sectors must make closing the wage gap a national imperative. (MN)

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INTRODUCTION

The past ten years have been marked by major gains for working women. Women now have access to jobs previously closed to them. Lawsuits have established legal precedents for equal opportunity and have resulted in millions of dollars in back pay and sweeping reforms through court-ordered affirmative action programs. Equal pay settlements have made equal pay for equal work more than an abstract concept.

More and more women are shown as executives on television, in newspaper ads, and in advertising promotions. Successful women are the subject of articles in the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, and in women's magazines. There are women mayors and governors, construction workers and business executives, pole climbers and ditch-diggers. Recent opinion polls indicate that a large segment of the public now believes that women have made it and that men are victims of "reverse discrimination."

Yet, in spite of these breakthroughs, the overall economic status of women has improved very little. According to the latest government statistics, women now earn only 59¢ for every $1.00 men make. Twenty-five years ago, women made 64¢ for every $1.00 men made.

How is it possible that such a disparity between image and reality exists? The fact is that employers have only created an appearance of equality through public relations programs and advancement for a few, select women. Little if any change has occurred for the majority of working women.

This report documents the current economic status of working women and the need for a comprehensive program for economic equality.

PROFILE OF WORKING WOMEN

Labor Force Participation

Today there are over 44 million working women in the civilian labor force, accounting for approximately 42% of the total, over 2/5 of all workers. An increasing majority, 65% of women aged 20-54, are now part of the workforce. Moreover, in the past 25 years the number of working women has nearly doubled.

Of the 44 million, 7 million (16%) are members of minority groups. Approximately 51% of all minority women are now in the labor force--a percentage that has remained stable over time. In 1948 the proportion of working minority women was 46%, only slightly lower than it is now.

Marital Status

Given the traditional assumptions about women's family obligations, what kind of women work today? Fifty-six percent are married, 25% are single and over 19% are widowed, divorced, or separated. Among the 7 million minority women in the labor force, more than half (58%) have never married or are widowed, divorced or separated from their husbands.

Working Mothers and Female-Headed Families

Today, mothers are more likely to work than ever before. Sixty percent of all mothers with children of school age are working, a five-fold increase since 1940. One-third of all married women with newborn babies held jobs in 1978. Forty-five percent of mothers with children under the age of six are now working.

The number of families with children under the age of eighteen which are headed by women is also increasing. Between 1930 and 1978, families headed by women have tripled in number. Of the 57.8 million families in March 1978,

women headed 8.5 million of them. Fifty-nine and one-half percent of the women family heads were in the labor force, and more than 3/4 of these workers were the only earners in their families. More than 1 out of 10 women in the labor force was head of a family. Among the 2.4 million minority women heading families in March 1978, 56% were in the labor force. More than 2 of every 5 minority women workers headed families.

Median income of families headed by women is considerably lower than the median income of husband-wife families: $8,537 compared to $19,340 (1978 figures).

A similar ratio exists when comparing the median income of black families headed by women ($5,888) to those black families with male heads ($15,578).

But these figures do not present the complete picture. Clearly one out of every three female-headed households, as compared to one out of every eighteen male-headed households, is living below the poverty level. Of the 24.5 million persons below the poverty level in 1978, about 61% (15 million) were women and children. While women maintained about 15% of all families in 1978, they maintained 50% of the families below the poverty level in that year. One-half of all minority families headed by women are below the poverty level.

The profile of women working today is different from that of 25 years ago. Women are holding jobs because of family responsibilities and a need for self-sufficiency. The concept of husband as breadwinner, the wife as full-time homemaker caring for several children no longer represents the typical American family. In fact, only 7% of the nation's families fit that description.

A record three out of every five husband-wife families reported in March 1979 that at least two family members were earners during the previous year. Both husbands and wives are working in 58% of the nation's marriages, with full-time working wives contributing 39% of the families' incomes.

STATUS OF WORKING WOMEN

Occupation

What exactly is the situation for all these working women? Their occupational and financial positions indicate second-class treatment even though their growing participation documents first-class contributions to the economy. Women have consistently remained clustered in certain occupational groups associated with low-paying, dead-end, tedious jobs. Over half are classified as clericals, operatives, or service workers. Among the 38.9 million women employed in 1978, 13.5 million were clerical workers; 3.3 million were nurses, health technicians, and health service workers; 2.1 million were teachers; 1.1 million were service workers in private households; and 3.0 million were food service workers.

Men, on the other hand, are concentrated in the professional, technical, and managerial positions. Compared to six percent of males who hold clerical jobs, 35% of working women are clericals, including 4 million who are secretaries, stenographers, or typists. Another 20% are service workers, 3% of whom are women doing household work. In the professional field as a whole, women slightly outrank men--15% of all employed women are professionals compared to 14% of employed men. However, a full 67% of all women professionals are teachers and health workers. These professions command much lower pay than professions such as law, medicine, and engineering, in which more men are found.

Employment patterns for minority women illustrate the effects of double discrimination, as these women are in the lowest rank of all race and sex occupational groups. Minority women are found most often in the lowest occupational echelons--over 49% of them are working as operatives and service workers compared to 20% of all men. The proportion of minority women in the professional group is 14%.

In all, women account for 80% of all clericals in this country, only 25% of the managers and administrators, and a mere 6% of the craft workers. Women at present are estimated to hold fewer than 1% of the directorships of top American corporations, fewer than 1% of the top management posts, and approximately 5% of all middle management positions.

Income

It should not be astonishing then, to find that women relative to men continue to receive lower wages. It may be somewhat surprising, however, that the economic status of women is actually deteriorating.

Ninety percent of all women year-round full-time workers earn less than $15,000 compared to only 52% of all men in the same situation. On the average, women employed full-time are paid three-fifths of men's wages in comparable jobs. In 1978, the median income of women was 59% of that for men ($9,350 vs. $15,730). This represents a decline from 25 years ago when female wages were 64% of male wages. Even when the adjustments for differences in occupation, education, and work experience are taken into account, the gap does not narrow appreciably.

Substantial income differentials occur throughout occupational categories. For example, earnings of females in proportion to males are 71% for professionals and technicals, 65% for clericals, 66% for service workers, and 52% in sales.

A scant 8.8% of employed women earn between $15,000 and $25,000 versus over 35% of working men; 0.9% make $25,000 and over compared to 13% of male workers. workers. Back in 1960, white women had a 6% chance of holding a job in the top 5% of earnings. By 1977, the probability of a woman rather than a man earning $25,000 was less than 0.1%.

Earnings distributions of year-round full-time workers in 1977 show that a woman was 2.7 times more likely than a man to earn less than $10,000. In fact, 32 of every 100 women, but only 11 of every 100 men, earn less than $7,000.

In addition, salaries for traditionally "female" jobs are not keeping pace. The average increase in salary for most clerical jobs actually fell from 7.6% in 1976 to 6.3% in 1980.

Although minority women have made gains in the recent years in their earnings, they still are far from equal to men in wages. The median wage or salary income of year-round full-time workers in 1978 was lowest for minority women--$8,331 for Hispanic women and $9,020 for black women, approximately 70% of the income of minority men, and only 55% of the income of all men.

Unemployment

The unemployment rate for women is consistently higher than that for men (6.8% vs. 5.1% in 1979). Among women, as well as among men, there is a definite association between worker education and skill and levels of unemployment.

Unemployment is lower for persons with higher education and skill. Yet, even among persons with the same age and education, the unemployment rate is higher for women than it is for men.

The dual discrimination experienced by minority women also appears in the unemployment rate. The average unemployment rate for minority women in 1979 was over twice as high as the rate for all men--11.1% black females were unemployed compared to 5.1% for all men.

More families headed by women are affected by unemployment than families headed by men. In 1979, 40% of all women heading families were unemployed compared to 33% of men heading families. Unemployment for a woman who is head of a family causes particularly serious hardships since she must play the dual role of breadwinner and mother.

SHATTERING THE MYTHS

These economic facts are often explained away in a variety of ways. Some argue that women just work for fun--for "pin money." And since women don't need to work, they should be paid less, hired last and laid off first.

In fact, over the past twenty-five years, there have been dramatic changes in women's participation in the workforce. Now, over 60% of mothers with school-age children work. Now, women on the average work at least 23 years. Now, almost two-thirds of all working women are single, widowed, divorced, separated, or have husbands who earn under $10,000. And given the current rate of price increases, the rest are working to maintain the family's standard of living.

There is another myth which attempts to explain the wide difference in male/female pay patterns and occupations. Women are paid less and find fewer job opportunities because they supposedly have less education. In fact, a female college graduate can expect to earn $2,000 less than a male high school drop-out.

MEDIAN INCOME IN 1978 OF FULL-TIME WORKERS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND SEX*

High School	Women	Men
1-3 Years	$ 7,996	$14,199
4 Years	9,769	16,396
College Degree	12,115	20,078

*Persons 14 years old and older.

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau

The average woman worker has the same education as the average working man--both have completed a median of 12.5 years of schooling.

Another myth commonly cited is that women aren't reliable employees--they are absent more and are more likely to quit than men. Studies on labor turnover indicate that net differences between men and women are generally small. In manufacturing industries the latest data available shows a "quit" rate of 2.6% for women and 2.2% for men. With regard to absenteeism, full time women workers lost an average of 4.3% of their usual hours in 1978 due to illnesses, injuries, and miscellaneous personal reasons compared to 3.1% for men.

THE REAL CAUSES OF THE WAGE GAP

Women Are Denied Equal Pay for Equal Work

One of the major systemic problems in corporate employment policies stems from the fact that women are denied equal pay for equal work. Historically, women and men worked side by side doing the same work, holding the same job title, but the men earned higher salaries. While this form of blatant discrimination continues to exist, in most companies pay inequities are camouflaged. Intricate job classification systems create diverse job titles to mask work that is virtually the same. Often women are placed in lower job codes than men even though their work is comparable to that of male co-workers in higher job codes. For example, women may hold the title of "assistant manager" while men are higher paid "managers," yet their actual experience, skill, and job content are comparable.

In every major occupational group, the earnings of fully employed women lag significantly behind those of men in the same occupations.

AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS BY SEX, 1978

Occupation	1978 Average Weekly Earnings		Women's Salary as a Percent of Men's
	Men	Women	
Sales workers	$335	$175	52%
Blue collar workers	327	216	66
Managers and administrators	422	247	58
Clerical workers	301	195	65
Service workers, except private household	223	147	66
Professional and technical workers	392	280	71

Source: U. S. Department of Labor

Jobs Traditionally Held by Women Rate Lower Salaries

A second major problem is the setting of corporate salary administration policies which assign lower salaries to jobs traditionally held by women regardless of the skills and experience required for those jobs. For example, nearly 80% of all clerical workers are female. Their average wages are the lowest of any white-collar workers. In 1980 the average weekly salary for clerical workers was $200 ($10,400 annually) reflecting a range from $153 per week for file clerks to $268 per week for executive secretaries.

Companies classify jobs as clerical and set salary rates and ceilings for these jobs with little or no consideration of the actual job content. It is not unusual for corporate salary schedules to fail to distinguish between lower skilled and higher skilled clerical jobs even though jobs within the clerical classification are often very different in terms of skills required. Further, companies make few provisions for a schedule of salary increases to reward seniority and reflect the abilities developed over time in a company. The principle used to set salaries is the fact that women hold these jobs, rather than standards based on objective analysis that results in wage rates based on actual skills involved. For example, often women classified in low-salaried clerical codes actually have major responsibilities for departmental work. Women who supervise all-female departments are often assigned lower salaries even though their supervisory responsibilities are comparable to those of supervisors in departments where both men and women work. Further, supervisory jobs traditionally held by women often rate lower salaries than supervisory jobs held by men even when responsibilities are comparable.

EARNINGS AND EDUCATION FOR MALE AND FEMALE OCCUPATIONS

Male Intensive Occupations	Median Years of School--1970	Median Earnings 1970	1985*
Truck Drivers	9.0	$ 9,640	$16,160
Auto Mechanics	10.5	9,070	13,270
Deliverymen	11.7	9,060	12,720
Wholesale Sales Representatives	13.8	13,690	21,030
Managers and Administrators (non-financial)	13.8	16,770	26,040
Female Intensive Occupations			
Retail Sales Clerks	12.7	6,470	9,480
Bookkeepers	13.7	6,540	9,600
Typists	13.7	6,070	8,890
Secretaries	13.9	6,860	10,100
Registered Nurses	14.2	8,090	11,970

*Projected by U. S. Department of Labor

Sources: U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
U. S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau

Progress in raising wages in female intensive occupations has been made only through unionization. Currently, women covered by union contracts earn 30% more than women who are not.

Secretarial work is a prime example of designating "women's work" as automatically lower paid. Even the current secretarial shortage has not produced significant wage increases, in spite of the business publications' pronouncements to the contrary.

According the the U. S. Department of Labor, approximately 300,000 secretarial and stenographic jobs are now opening every year, more than for any other job classification. Further, this rate of openings is projected to continue at least through the 1980's. The current shortage of secretaries is estimated at 20% or about 60,000 positions per year. If the shortage continues at the anticipated rate, it will reach 500,000 openings by 1985. Commenting on the

growing shortage, the Chicago Tribune recently reported that a competent secretary with good shorthand skills is in greater demand than a college graduate with a liberal arts degree. According to the article, companies are responding to the shortage with higher entry-level salaries, bigger raises, and better working conditions to lure qualified individuals.

According to conventional wisdom, the "natural dynamics" of the labor market--i.e. supply and demand--should result in higher wages to attract more workers to secretarial work and to retain those now in the field. However, statistics show that average wages for secretaries are not increasing enough to keep pace with the rate of inflation, much less respond to a shortage. Overall, secretaries received average raises of 7.3% last year, lower than the average for all clericals, and substantially lower than raises in professional and blue-collar categories. In the face of a documented shortage, 1978 salaries for executive secretaries remained unchanged from one year earlier, while salaries for lower paid secretaries rose only 3%.

AVERAGE WAGE INCREASES IN
SELECTED FIELDS, MARCH, 1978

Occupation	% Increase
Directors of personnel (March '77-'78)	10.0%
Attorneys (March '77-'78)	9.1
Chemists (March '77-'78)	9.0
Engineers (March '77-'78)	9.0
Computer operators (March '77-'78)	8.5
Accountants (March '77-'78)	8.3
Blue collar workers (Sept. '77-'78)	8.0
Buyers (March '77-'78)	7.8
Clericals (includes typists, acctg. clerks, file clerks, etc.) (March '77-'78)	7.4
Professional & technical (Sept. '77-'78)	6.9
Secretaries (March '77-'78)	6.5

Source: U. S. Department of Labor

Apparently, the law of supply and demand operates to raise wages when shortages occur in male-dominated fields, but not in female-dominated fields. For the entire four-year period 1974-1978, the average wages for a secretary increased a total of approximately $1,800. During the same period, average wages for engineers, a male-dominated occupation in short supply, increased close to $6,300--nearly $4,500 more than for secretaries. Over just the last two years, computer operators' average pay rose $1,500--$400 more than secretaries' pay rose.

Taking these statistics into account, it appears that the corporate response to the secretarial shortage is primarily a public relations program designed to encourage applicants for secretarial positions. In fact, the secretarial shortage is due to the fact that secretaries are as underpaid and overworked today as they have been in the past.

Women Are Denied Access to Higher Paying Jobs

In 1960, 52% of all women were employed in just four occupations: clerks, saleswomen, waitresses, and hairdressers. In 1978, 47% of all working women could be found in these categories.

Twenty years ago, 12% of women were professional and technical workers--over half of these were teachers and nurses. Today, only 16% of women work in professional and technical positions--still over half of these are teachers and nurses.

Twenty years ago, 5% of working women were managers. Today, only 6% are managers.

Twenty years ago, 1% of working women were in skilled craft jobs. Today, only 2% of working women hold these jobs.

OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF WORKING WOMEN

Occupation	1960	1978
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Clerical workers	30.3	34.6
Service workers, except private household	14.8	17.7
Professional and technical workers	12.4	15.6
Operatives	15.2	11.8
Sales workers	7.7	6.9
Managers and administrators	5.0	6.1
Private household workers	8.9	2.9
Craft workers	1.0	1.8
Other	4.3	5.5

Source: U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Traditionally, women have been placed in dead-end jobs with no career paths for advancement; they often face a "catch-22" situation. In order to qualify for more responsible jobs, certain training and certain job experience are necessary, but women are denied access to jobs which would qualify them for higher paying positions. And then employers assert that no "qualified" women can be found to fill job openings.

In recent years, some women have gained access to jobs with possibilities for promotion. However, these jobs are often limited to certain classifications or departments where career paths and future earning power are severely limited.

For example, most insurance women are usually found in the less lucrative personal lines rather than commercial lines. Women work in "inside" sales jobs where opportunities for advancement are limited, while men are placed in "outside" sales positions which are higher paying and are the route to higher level positions. Women are concentrated in staff, personnel, or administrative departments where salaries are lower and opportunities limited. In retail sales, women are assigned to sell low-priced items while men are placed in the "big ticket" higher commission departments.

Even as a few women have finally succeeded in breaking the barriers and entered job classifications traditionally held by men, women are clustered in the lowest-paid positions in these classifications, and progression up the career ladder is slower than for their male counterparts. For example, women bank officers, whose non-officer years far outnumber those for their male counterparts, predominate in the lowest salary grades for officers.

When women are initially placed in dead-end jobs, their opportunities for advancement are obviously limited. When certain jobs are viewed as "women's jobs" and others are viewed as "men's jobs," mobility for women is reduced and economic achievement is limited. When women are promoted more slowly than men even when their qualifications, skills and experience are comparable, women never achieve salaries commensurate with male co-workers in similar jobs.

THE FUTURE FOR WORKING WOMEN

Labor Force Participation

According to the U. S. Department of Labor projections, the number of women in the labor force will increase by 11.6 million by the year 1990. Over the same period, the number of male workers will increase by 9.6 million. Sixty-one percent of women aged 18-64 will be working in 1990.

These government projections about the participation of women in the labor force may be too conservative. In fact, the Department of Labor has revised its figures upward by five million over estimates published six years ago.

Occupation

As their numbers swell, what are the prospects for improved status for working women? Simply because women will make up a larger proportion of the labor

force, and perhaps because of some impact from equal employment opportunity requirements, women can expect to increase their representation in most fields. More women will be employed in the professional, managerial, and technical fields. In addition, some breakthroughs in the crafts can be expected. However, any such changes will be completely overshadowed by women continuing to fill the clerical and service jobs in the U. S. economy. In fact, it is projected that nearly 70% of the increase in employment for women will take place in these fields. For example, in 1970, 97.6% of the secretaries and 94.2% of the typists were women. In 1985, the figures are anticipated to be 98.6% and 93.2%, respectively. If the representation of working women in some of the highest paid occupations is considered, the shifts projected and the gap in wages is far from promising.

DISTRIBUTION OF CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT
FOR WOMEN, 1970 - 1985

Employment Increase (in millions)--7.6

Percent Distribution of Increase:

Professionals & technicals	8.2%
Managers & administrators	3.6
Sales workers	10.1
Clerical workers	44.4
Craftsmen & foremen	3.4
Operatives	7.4
Service workers	23.9
Laborers, except farm	0.1
Farm occupations	-1.1
Total	100.0

Source: U. S. Department of Labor

In essence, the obvious occupational segregation of working women can be expected to remain an obvious characteristic of the U. S. economy.

Income

Although women will continue to be relegated to few occupational slots, will their vital contributions to the American economy be recognized in the future? Will women, relative to men, finally receive equal pay for equal work? Unfortunately, there is no reason for working women to expect significant improvement in their depressed financial status. Twenty years ago women earned 64¢ for every dollar their male counterparts received. Today, the ratio stands at 59¢.

CLOSING THE WAGE GAP: A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE

If women are ever to achieve economic equality, a new approach is needed. Current corporate equal opportunity efforts are clearly inadequate. Every year, corporations spend millions of dollars for attorneys' fees, affirmative action programs, public relations efforts, and paperwork generated to meet government reporting requirements. Yet, corporations are not addressing the wage gap between men and women. Our society has established the principle of equality for working women through laws, court rulings and government regulations. It's time now to make that principle a reality.

A new approach and framework is needed to guarantee a continuation of the gains women have made--to move beyond token achievements for a few working women to a strategy for the kinds of systemic changes needed for the majority of working women.

To determine whether real progress is being made, a single standard for measuring women's economic status is needed. The wage gap is that standard. Changes in it must become the measure of progress or lack of it.

Various sectors responsible for ensuring equal opportunity, such as government and corporate employers, must adopt this standard. For example, government agencies currently spend over $100 million to enforce equal opportunity laws. A measure of their performance must be whether the wage gap between men and women diminishes during a given year. As these agencies develop policies and enforcement mechanisms, they must analyze how these will contribute to closing the wage gap.

Currently, corporations spend millions of dollars to hire equal opportunity consultants, affirmative action officers, attorneys, public relations experts, and other specialists. A standard for measuring the effectiveness of these corporate efforts must be whether the wage gap diminishes in any year. Individual corporations must analyze the wage gap between male and female employees. They must analyze their salary administration programs, affirmative action plans, and equal opportunity efforts to determine how these will contribute to closing the wage gap in their companies.

Closing the wage gap must be a national imperative. Today, 44 million women work, accounting for 42% of the entire workforce. Millions of working women continue to be denied equal pay for equal work, fair salaries, and access to higher paying jobs. Women have the right to expect that their growing contribution to this nation's economy will be recognized in their paychecks. Women have the right to expect that this nation's commitment to ending discrimination is made a reality in the job market. It's time now to reverse the trend of

deterioration in the economic status of working women. It's time now for a major campaign to reverse the decline of the last quarter century. Token gains are no longer acceptable. Closing the wage gap must be a national mandate for all sectors of American society.

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